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Cotton textiles of every sort – fine, superfine and coarse – were once manufactured in abundance in the province of Bengal. The produce of the looms not only fully met the internal demand of her population but was also exported to distant lands where it was held in high esteem. The extraordinary diffusion of the industry throughout the province that made possible surplus production had its abrupt end in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Vera Anstey, the decline continued throughout the nineteenth century.¹ Among the causes of its decline were the oppression of the East India Company's servants on the weavers, the iniquitous tariff policy of the colonial government both in England and in India and the industrial revolution. Other causal factors that have been mentioned are the disappearance of the regal courts in India and the slow, laborious and wasteful methods followed in the manufacture of cotton fabrics by handloom weavers.² The decline naturally resulted in the loss of a time-honoured hereditary profession in which millions were employed. Most members of the weaving caste either lost their job or became destitute. In this paper, however, we intend to focus our attention solely on the cotton textile industry of Bengal from 1900 till the end of the colonial period in 1947. In other words, we shall be looking both at the cotton mill industry of the province that was set up as a result of emergence of modern factory system in India as well as at the handloom industry. Thus by avoiding a fragmentary study, we shall have a complete glimpse of the cotton textile industry as a whole. We shall then also be able to evaluate the contribution of each branch of the textile industry to the economy of Bengal.

The Cotton Mill Industry

Cultivation of cotton, ginning and bailing

The Dhaka *muslin* was made of *desee* cotton, the best of which was produced in the district of Dhaka. Besides Dhaka, *kapas*³ was also grown in some other districts though very insufficient to meet the requirements of the

province.⁴ Hence to stimulate the growth of cotton, attempts were made to grow long staple cotton in the plains of Bengal since the middle of the nineteenth century but those measures proved a failure due to "heavy rainfall and the great variety of insects and pests to which cotton is dominantly susceptible".⁵ Another difficulty as pointed out by J. G. Medlicott was that cultivation of cotton became uneconomic with the arrival of other crops. "The difficulties seem to consist principally in the fact that the cotton crop, as now cultivated, is out of favour; that other crops pay better, and cannot therefore be readily displaced."⁶ The Bengal cotton crop in 1918-19 represented less than one-half per cent of the total Indian outturn and was mainly grown in Jalpaiguri, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Garrow and in the Tippera Hills.⁷ The total annual production of raw cotton in Bengal varied between 19,000 bales (of 400 lbs.) in 1917-18 and 30,000 bales in 1915-16.⁸ The chief characteristics of *binni tula* grown in Chittagong-Tippera region was that it was short stapled, rough and had a reddish colour. Cloth made from it was highly prized, as it resembled the ochre coloured garments of religious devotees and did not fade or show dirt.⁹ With a view to improving the short staple cotton, the Indian Central Cotton Committee took up a scheme in November 1933 towards the establishment of a Cotton Research Station at Rangamati initially for a period of five years and later extended up to April 1, 1940.¹⁰ But the results were not very encouraging. The decennial census returns also do not give us any clue as to the number of persons engaged in the cultivation of cotton, wholly or as subsidiary occupation.¹¹ Being a deficit area, raw cotton had to be imported to supplement the local production.¹² For processing raw cotton for use at home, a number of cotton ginning and bailing factories were set up.¹³ In 1939, there were ten such factories in Howrah industrial centre employing some 1,150 persons daily.¹⁴ Dhaka district had one factory employing 708 workers, and Chittagong had three employing 916 persons.¹⁵

Growth of the Industry

Messrs Kettlewell Bullen and Company established the first cotton textile mill in India - Bowreah Cotton Mills in Howrah in 1832.¹⁶ This pioneering effort was made nineteen years before Cowasji Nanabhoy Davar

set up the first cotton mill in Bombay in 1851.¹⁷ However, while Bombay Island marched rapidly forward in this industry, Bengal lagged behind. By 1890, Bombay island alone had no less than 70 mills.¹⁸ On the other hand, Bengal had only ten cotton mills turning out woven goods to the extent of 7.2 million lbs and employing 11,227 persons in 1904-05.¹⁹ The number of spinning and weaving mills increased to 18 by 1921 employing 13,735 persons.²⁰ The cotton textile industry after having received partial tariff protection in 1926-27 managed to crawl forward.²¹ In 1937, the number of mills was 26 while a good many were reported to be in course of erection or recently registered.²² The comparative picture of the industry in India in August, 1942 may be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Position of Cotton Textile Mills in India (August, 1942)

Name of Province	Number of mills	Capital paid-up (in Rs.)	Number of spindles at work daily	Number of looms installed	Number of hands employed
Bengal	33	2,94,89,501	4,05,805	10,712	24,169
Central Provinces	07	2,19,79,350	2,73,321	5,299	19,280
Berar	04	29,75,000	65,740	1,445	4,132
United Provinces	27	3,04,46,810	6,91,063	12,526	31,659
Madras	64	5,30,56,193	13,61,774	5,776	61,251
Bombay (including Sind)	203	28,030,1,102	1,00,05,785	2,00,076	4,30,165

Source: *Report of Bengal Industrial Survey Committee (Alipore, 1948)*, p. 35.

Several characteristics of Bengal cotton mills become apparent from Table 1. First, from the point of view of the number of mills, Bengal's position was third - rather a distant third. Compared to Bombay's 203 mills and Madras's 64, Bengal had only 33. Second, if we look at the average paid-up capital of the mills, the weakness of Bengal mills will at once be observable. Compared to Bombay's average paid-up capital of Rs. 13.8 lakh per mill and United Province's Rs.11.27 lakhs, the paid-up capital of an average Bengal mill stood at Rs. 8.93 lakh. In other words, Bengal mills were comparatively smaller in size, and hence perhaps not cost-effective

production units. Reorganization was indeed suggested by one of the contemporary Calcutta newspapers that opined, "It is a pity that the Bengal Mill-owners Association have so far devoted little attention to this aspect of the matter".²³ Third, from the point of view of installed capacity of spindles, Bengal's position was fourth, even behind that of the United Province which had 6,91,063 spindles compared to Bengal's just over four lakhs. Bengal had also fewer numbers of installed looms than the United Provinces. The average number of persons employed in the cotton mills of Bengal stood at 24,169 in August, 1942 compared to 4,30,165 in Bombay, 61,251 in Madras, 31,659 in the United Provinces and 19,280 in the seven mills of the Central Provinces.

One major inhibiting factor behind this dismal scenario was Bengal's dependency for raw materials on other provinces. Mills, irrespective of their locality, had to import raw cotton chiefly from the Central Provinces and Berar.²⁴ On the other hand, Bombay province enjoyed favourable transport network, as it was located within the main Cotton Belt of India that extended from Kathiawar to Gujarat in the Bombay province and to central India. Besides, Bengal cotton mills had also to face stiff competition from established and mature foreign and Indian mills. Trade oppression in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Permanent Settlement had also an adverse impact in the sense that it led the Bengalis to prefer landownership over investment in industries. The failure of Swadeshi industrial enterprises at the beginning of the twentieth century further disappointed and confounded them. However, they gradually overcame this negative attitude and were seen establishing mills to take the benefit of local market demand, especially after the granting of protection to the industry, in 1926-27. In this connection it may be noted that the European managing agents who had wide experience and technical know-how and were significantly participating in the foreign trade of the province, in the transport sector, and in jute, tea, and larger collieries failed to come up in this line. Out of the nine larger cotton mills employing more than 1,000 persons a day in 1937, only two (Bowreah and Dunbar mills, No. 4) were owned by European managing agents.²⁵ Their unwillingness to come forward to float new cotton mills may be attributed perhaps to their preference for stereotyped business in which they had already invested a considerable sum of money and were getting a

steady rate of return.²⁶ The question of conscious avoidance to come into direct competition with England's long standing and mature cotton textile industry might have also weighed their decision against fresh investment in this line at a period of political uncertainty and economic slackness.

Mill production: Yarn and goods

Of the 22 mills in existence in 1936, three were spinning mills, six were weaving mills, and 13 were spinning and weaving mills.²⁷ The largest production by the mills in Bengal were of counts ranging from 11 to 20. In 1932-33, 52.36 per cent and in 1936-37, 40.75 per cent of the yarn spun were of this variety (Table 2).

Table 2

Yarn spun in Bengal Cotton Textile Mills in 1932-33, 1936-37

Counts/ numbers	1932-33 (in lbs.)	1936-37 (in lbs.)
1 - 10	3,378,087	4,067,111
11 - 20	21,375,942	15,523,643
21	3,440,803	109,708
22	2,096,338	1,600,902
30	1,970,845	3,289,338
32	1,659,386	2,304,069
40	1,220,439	1,545,685
Above 40	953,307	2,331,249
Waste	2,116,780	2,731,028
Rest	2,609,561	4,561,742

Source: Government of Bengal, Department of Industries, *Bulletin No. 75, Cotton Mill Industry in Bengal* (Alipore, 1937), p. 30.

Here it may be mentioned that, the most important counts (single) from the point of view of handlooms were exactly those spun by the mills in Bengal in larger quantities. "A considerable quantity of the total production by the mills themselves may, therefore, be taken to be for catering to the handloom weavers".²⁸ Annual production of yarn of other counts could also be seen from Table 2. The percentage of yarn that Bengal mills produced compared to total Indian mill production was insignificant. In 1927-28, Bengal produced only 2.82 per cent of the total mill production of Indian yarn

compared to 40.36 per cent by Bombay Presidency (minus Bombay island), 26.16 per cent by Bombay island, 9.12 per cent by Ahmedabad mills, 5.64 per cent by Madras, 5.47 per cent by the United Provinces, 6.92 per cent by the Indian States and 3.52 per cent by Central Provinces and Berar.²⁹ In the 1930's, the production of yarn in Bengal mills to total Indian production was still trivial. In fact, it never rose above 4.33 per cent between the years 1931-32 and 1936-37 (Table 3).

Table 3
Total Yarn Spun in Bengal Mills 1931-32 to 1936-37

Year	Yarn spun in Bengal (in lbs.)	Percentage to total Indian production
1931-32	37,620,373	3.89
1932-33	40,821,488	4.02
1933-34	39,912,399	4.33
1934-35	41,056,056	4.09
1935-36	40,991,244	3.87
1936-37	38,064,475	3.61

Source: As in Table 2.

As regards woven goods, the production picture improved vastly over the years (Appendix II). The most important products turned out by the Bengal mills were necessarily grey and bleached piece-goods as this formed the clothing of the masses.³⁰ Bengal produced 153.2 million yards of this particular variety of goods which was 5.54 per cent of all-India production of this description of goods in 1936-37 (Table 4). Grey and bleached piece-goods included *chadars*, *dhuties*, drills and jeans, cambric's and lawns, printers, shirtings and longcloth, T. cloth, domestics and sheets, tent cloth, *khadi* or *khaddar* and a small variety of other sorts. However, the loin cloth worn by men known as *dhuti*, *lungi*, *mardari* or *dobja* alone dominated the production line. In 1932-33, 82.4 million yards and in 1936-37, 120.1 million yards of *dhuti* cloth was produced in the mills of Bengal.³¹ In other words, in 1936-37, 78.42 per cent of the total production of grey and bleached piece-goods were for *dhuti* alone. In the same year, shirtings and longcloth to the tune of 25 million yards were woven which was 16.31 per cent of the total grey and bleached piece goods. The production of *khadi* or

khaddar was 3.85 million yards and that of *chadars* 1.92 million yards. The production of coloured piece goods amounted to 4.26 and 2.94 million yards in 1932-33 and 1936-37 respectively. However, Bengal produced a significant percentage of the total hosiery goods of India. The production was taken up in Bengal in the 1890's but the Swadeshi Movement supplied a fresh impetus for starting the industry anew.³²

Table 4
Woven Goods Produced in Bengal Mills, 1936-37

Kinds of goods	Bengal production	Percentage to all-India production
Grey and bleached piece-goods		
Pounds	31,961,498	5.12
Yards	153,215,293	5.54
Coloured piece goods		
Pounds	584,346	0.37
Yards	2,943,647	0.36
Grey and coloured goods other than piece goods		
Pounds	78	0.00
Dozen	21	0.00
Hosiery	2,212,555	34.22
Pounds		
Dozen	648,026	32.79
Miscellaneous-	180,747	3.24
Pounds		
Cotton goods mixed with silk or wool:	46,660	0.78
Pounds		
Grand total :		
Pounds	34,985,884	4.47
Yards	156,158,940	4.37
Dozen	684,047	2.82

Source: As in Table 2.

Though the total production capacity of the cotton mill industry of Bengal expanded considerably in the twentieth century under protective tariff regime, yet there was ample scope for further expansion of the mills

both in the spinning and weaving section. This became all the more apparent during World War II when existing Bengal mills were unable to supply sufficient cloth and yarn to the people and the weavers, respectively. As a result of this, among other things, there was an astronomical rise in the price of cotton goods. Other deficiencies in respect of equipment, productive technique and the varieties of goods that the mills needed to produce also became apparent during the war. To overcome the deficiencies, considerable private investment was required. The expansion and reorganization programme, however, had to wait till return to normalcy when increasing orders were placed for cotton mill machinery from abroad.³³

Handloom Cotton Textile Industry

In spite of its decline, handloom cotton textile industry still remained the largest and most extensive of the cottage industries of the province at the beginning of the twentieth century. The main reason for its survival was that in weaving coarser counts of cloth, cotton mills did not have the scope for economies resulting from large-scale production by machinery.³⁴ Prejudice of a section of the people against *vilayati* goods and the preference of the people for coarse goods turned out by the handlooms for its durability are other reasons for its survival. The ability of handloom industry to produce fabrics of distinct variety for ceremonial occasions and the resilience of Bengal weavers themselves have also contributed to its survival.³⁵

Aggregate handloom production of Bengal

Analyses of the aggregate production figures of cloth for the Bengal province (Appendix II) show that the output varied greatly from year to year. One of the primary reasons was the changing structure of political boundaries of the province till 1911-12. Thus, till 1904-05 the production figures represent that of Bengal (including Eastern Bengal) and Bihar and Orissa; the figures of 1905-06 include the sea-borne trade of Eastern Bengal and Assam with that of Bengal. On the other hand, the figures from 1906-07 to 1911-12 do not include the handloom production of Eastern Bengal as it then constituted part of a separate province with Assam; and from 1912-13 the figures do not include that of Bihar and Orissa for similar reasons. Therefore, standard data for the Bengal province are available from 1912 onwards.

However, changes in the political boundaries alone cannot explain the great increase in the handloom production for the period 1905-06 to 1911-12, the period that incidentally coincided with the partition of Bengal. The explanation lies partly in the Swadeshi movement of the period. The partition scheme "gave a fresh impetus to the Swadeshi movement - an impetus which has given rise to tremendous upheaval, the like of which has not been witnessed in this country within the memory of the oldest man living" observed the *Bengal Review*.³⁶ Another contemporary reported "a growing desire of the people to patronize indigenous goods" on the eve of partition.³⁷ The demand for handloom products nevertheless slumped with the outbreak of the war in 1914 and remained low till about 1920. This was mainly due to three principal reasons - the continuous rise in the price of cotton goods in Lancashire, the rise in the price of Indian cotton and the economic condition of India. The last one, so far as Bengal was concerned, had been accompanied by a large fall in the prices of jute and rice which made it very difficult for the cultivators and poorer classes generally to pay the abnormally high price demanded for cloth. With the return to normalcy in the 1920's and the intensification of the *Swadeshi* movement, the demand for handloom products picked up again. "As a result, however, of the intensive and extensive *Swadeshi* feeling in the country, particularly since 1930", wrote the Secretary, Indian Chamber of Commerce, "the production of cloth on the handlooms has increased greatly".³⁸ The economic problems of the 1930's that led to a fall in the general purchasing power of the people must have also diverted the demand for cloth from high priced goods and thereby exerting influence in the same direction as that of *Swadeshi* movement.³⁹

The increased demand for handloom products in the twentieth century (excepting inter-war period) was made, however, without any addition to the total number of weavers. On the contrary, there was rather a decline in the number of professional workers.⁴⁰ How are we then to explain this increase in output per unit of labour? The answer to this question lies in the technological changes brought about at this time in the methods of production, the most important of which was the gradual replacement of the old throw-shuttle looms with fly-shuttle looms. J. G. Cumming who made a survey of the Bengal industries in 1908 checked the weaving in many places

and found that the fly-shuttle loom averaged 65 picks against 22 per minute in the country loom.⁴¹ P.C. Mitter speaking in the Bengal Legislative Council claimed that a weaver could weave 10 to 12 yards of cloth per day by using the fly-shuttle loom against five yards with ordinary looms.⁴² The Government of Bengal also believed that the fly-shuttle looms doubled the output of the worker at once.⁴³ Moreover, the cloths turned out by these looms had also been claimed to be "excellently strong and durable, better in this respect than the imported cloth".⁴⁴ As regards the price, the pit fly-shuttle looms cost from Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 including two rollers while the Serampore fly-shuttle looms cost from Rs. 40 to Rs. 60. The output of the two was the same, about a yard per hour with medium counts of yarn.⁴⁵

In spite of its acknowledged advantages, the use of fly-shuttle looms took a very long time to spread in Bengal. E. B. Havell was one of the first non-officials to take up the matter early in the twentieth century. He was able through lectures, letters and advertisements to create an interest among the public on the subject. The *Swadeshi* movement that soon followed gave further encouragement to the movement and by 1908 it was claimed that 10,000 new looms were working in the province.⁴⁶ The Government of Bengal also seem to have favoured the idea which led to the appointment of N. N. Pillai as its Weaving Expert. The officer made extensive tours of the weaving centres in the province to demonstrate and supply improved apparatus and to instruct the people on improved methods of weaving.⁴⁷ An industrial census taken in 1921 showed nearly 30 per cent of the looms fitted with fly-shuttles (Table 5). With the establishment of the Industries Department in 1917, the drive to introduce fly-shuttle looms was carried out all the more vigorously. In their propaganda for the dissemination of the use of fly-shuttle looms and other improved devices like dobbies and jacquard machines, the Peripatetic and District Weaving Schools were of invaluable help. Up to March 1935, the Government District Weaving Schools (numbering nine) introduced 2,381 improved weaving appliances including sleys and the Peripatetic Weaving Schools (numbering 25) introduced no less than 10,157 sleys and other improved appliances.⁴⁸ The Government of Bengal also agreed from around 1928 to supply effective weaving appliances to the weavers at cost price and to bear the packing and transport charges of such appliances.⁴⁹ With such help and also due to communication among the

people themselves, the use of fly-shuttle looms and other improved weaving appliances had greatly increased in Bengal. In 1942, according to the Fact-finding Committee, 67 per cent of the handlooms of Bengal were of this improved variety.⁵⁰ In addition to the introduction of Key's fly-shuttle looms, other improved varieties of looms also came into use. Mention may be made of the Salvation Army loom and the Hattersley automatic loom but their number was insignificant.⁵¹

Production specialization of districts

Since the bulk of the population was economically poor, the goods produced were necessarily of coarse quality. The experiences of those who were closely connected with the industry suggest that practically the whole of the yarn (certainly 90 per cent) used by the handloom weavers in the 1930s were of Indian mill origin, and 80 per cent of those were of 12s to 32s counts. The remaining 20 per cent were of 40s counts and upwards.⁵² Md. Hasanuzzaman, a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, also maintained that weavers wove goods from coarser counts of yarn. He contended that 69 per cent of the weavers wove coarse counts, and 31 per cent fine counts.⁵³ The Bengal Industrial Survey Committee also opined that the bulk of the production was confined to the weaving of coarse varieties of cloth with shorter width.⁵⁴ The goods turned out by the weavers consisted of saris, *dhutis*, *lungis*, mosquito nets, *gamchas*, *chaddars*, etc. Of the total production, according to another report, 40 per cent were saris, 40 per cent *lungis*, nine per cent *chaddars*, six per cent *gamchas*, and five per cent *dhuties*.⁵⁵ But the validity of such figures remain open to question as various other products like table-cloths, mosquito-nets, *pardahs*, coats and shirts, cotton petticoats, etc have been left out of account in the estimate.

Having looked into the general nature of textile production in the province, we now intend to look at the concentration and importance of weaving in the various districts of Bengal. In this connection, the district of Dhaka deserves our foremost consideration as it once manufactured the world famous muslin of exquisite beauty and fineness. In 1890, there were only two or three families in Dhaka who still wove the famous Dhaka muslin from the country thread.⁵⁶ But such fabrics were then made only to meet specific order. Another 500 families made ordinary muslin with imported English thread.⁵⁷ Such cloth included the manufacture of plain

muslin, figured muslin and embroidered muslin. Plain muslin was prepared from British yarn for export to upper India and Nepal for wearing apparel. It cost anything from Rs. 5 to Rs. 60, the size being 20 yards by one yard.⁵⁸ Figured muslin, called *jamdani*, was a particular specialty of Dhaka. The best saris were prepared with a border of gold thread. Sometimes flowered pattern was woven in the cloth, when it was called '*jaladar jamdani*'. The length of the saris varied in size between five and six yards and width 44" to 50". The best products cost from Rs. 50 to Rs. 150 in 1912.⁵⁹

The producers of the finer varieties of muslin lived in Abdullaphur, Mireswarai, Demra, Siddhigang, Nawpara, Kachpur and in some other villages. Cotton muslin embroidered with a very fine quality of muga silk, called *kasida*, was also manufactured for export as turban to Egypt, Arabia and Turkey. But since the end of World War I, the production of this article became irregular due to want of demand. Mixed cloths of tussar, silk, and cotton, known as *azizi*, suffered the same fate. In spite of Dhaka's acknowledged decline in the manufacture of finer varieties, the district yet produced coarser goods in significant quantity for everyday use. Most of them adopted fly-shuttle looms and some took to Hattersley automatic looms and produced ordinary *dhuties*, *lungis*, *gamchas*, *chadars*, towels, handkerchiefs, *urnis*, bed-sheets, mosquito-nets. Depending upon demand, they also produced cushion covers, dress pieces, tea-cosy covers, etc. The embroidered saris of Kishorganj and Bajitpur of Mymensingh district and also the other Bajitpur in Tangail were in great demand till the middle of the nineteenth century. According to F. A. Sache's report published in 1917 saris from Bajitpur in the Kishorganj subdivision still found a ready market in Calcutta.⁶⁰ He further noted that the Kishorganj *tanzeb* (a variety of plain muslin) was as prized as the Dacca muslin. The weavers in and around Tangail also produced saris and dhutis with *muga* and *jari* borders. Weaving in the district of Faridpur was reported to have survived the competition of foreign and Indian mills "and is still the most important local cottage industry".⁶¹ Besides making coarser varieties of *dhutis*, *saris*, *lungis* and *gamchas* for which there was a fairly good local demand, they also manufactured bed-sheets of fine quality, and checked and striped fabrics for coats and shirts at Rajbari. The cotton check called *charkona* was sold in Calcutta. So far as Bakarganj district was concerned, its mosquito-nets produced at Madhabpasa was preferred by members of middle classes.⁶²

Table 5
Proportion of Looms with Fly-shuttles, 1921.

Districts	Number of looms			Hand- looms per million of the population	Hand- looms per sq. mile	Proportion of looms with fly-shuttle
	With fly shuttles	Without	Total			
Burdwan	2,011	1,931	3,942	2,739	146	51
Birbhum	1,645	4,199	5,844	6,895	333	28
Bankura	2,428	5,746	8,174	8,014	311	30
Midnapore	4,314	10,962	15,276	5,728	277	28
Hooghly	3,877	2,111	5,988	5,544	507	65
Howrah	589	510	1,099	1,102	207	54
24-Parganas	967	5	972	370	20	99
Nadia	2,726	2,199	4,925	3,311	177	55
Murshidabad	1,656	5,705	7,361	5,830	347	22
Jessore	5,818	1,114	6,932	4,025	239	84
Khulna	3,619	143	3,762	2,589	80	96
Rajshahi	118	379	497	334	18	24
Dinajpur	88	3,841	3,929	2,303	160	3
Jalpaiguri	14	2,531	2,545	2,718	87	-
Rangpur	3	401	404	161	12	1
Bogra	274	1,591	1,865	1,779	137	15
Pabna	2,929	5,693	8,622	6,204	466	34
Malda	1,025	903	1,928	1,956	102	53
Dacca	6,375	5,423	11,798	3,774	432	54
Mymensingh	958	10,671	11,629	2,404	185	8
Faridpur	6,004	1,958	7,962	3,539	136	75
Bakargunj	3,900	3,029	6,929	2,641	198	56
Tippera	986	11,446	12,432	4,532	486	7
Noakhali	826	8,205	9,031	6,132	596	9
Chittagong	6	6,812	6,818	4,231	273	-
Chittagong Hill Tracts	-	29,190	29,190	168,492	568	-
Total	53,168	160,718	213,886	272,846	7,463	951

Source: *Census of India, 1921, Volume V, Bengal, Part I Report* (Calcutta, 1923), pp. 400-401.

The most important centre of the weaving industry in Chittagong was at Pahartali.⁶³ Besides *khaddar* which was manufactured on a large scale on fly-shuttle looms, other chief products were *lungi* and *gamcha*.⁶⁴ At Cox's Bazar, the Mughls made silk and cotton *lungis* of bright colours for their own use and for sale in Burma.⁶⁵ In the district of Tippera, weaving alone once employed one-tenth of the population.⁶⁶ At Sarail, *tanzeb* was made almost as fine as the muslin of Dhaka.⁶⁷ Mainamati, besides producing bright coloured cotton checks suitable for *lungis* and good quality mosquito-nets, produced a species of *coloured saris*, known as *jam sari*, mainly worn by Muslim women.⁶⁸ *Jam sari* was also woven in the Noakhali district. J. E. Webster reported that about Rs. 1000 worth of *saris* was sold on every *hat* day at Chaumohani.⁶⁹ Mosquito-nets of Chaumuhani enjoyed great reputation. *Lungis* of superior quality in fast colours manufactured in the district was said to compete successfully with those imported from Holland and Burma.⁷⁰

The districts of Rajshahi division, excepting Pabna and Malda, were not engaged to any appreciable extent in the production of handloom goods. In Rajshahi, the industry was reported not to be in a satisfactory condition.⁷¹ It may be mentioned that, these district specialized in silk spinning and weaving. On the other hand, due to absence of village community in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, there was a virtual absence of functional castes. The local population either pursued agriculture or worked in the tea gardens. The Lepchas of Darjeeling, however, used to make and wear a picturesque dress manufactured with coarse yarn which had white or red background striped with red and blue or yellow and blue.⁷² The people of Rangpur were engaged more in the cultivation of valuable crops, such as jute and mustard due to "remarkable fertility of the soil" (85 per cent people were dependent on agriculture against the average of 76 for Eastern Bengal).⁷³ Moreover, more men were engaged in this district as fish dealers than in any other in the province excepting one.⁷⁴ The case of Dinajpur was also one of dependency on agriculture (91 per cent of the total population was dependent on agriculture).⁷⁵ Nor could they weave better quality cloths other than coarse ones which "compares very unfavourably in appearance and evenness of texture with the imported Manchester cloth".⁷⁶ Hence, there was little demand for such cloth excepting for home use by the Rajbansi women who manufactured *phota* cloth from jute and cotton. As local production of textile goods was insufficient, Bogra district had also to

import cloth for use from Calcutta or Murshidabad.⁷⁷ In Malda, the most important centres of textile production were the Kaliachak thana and round Kaligram in Kharba thana. In Kaliachak, *saris*, *chaddars* and a sort of napkin were produced in fairly large quantities. In Kharba thana, the specialty was coloured mosquito-nets. On the other hand, "Weaving is the most important industry in Pabna. There are many handloom weavers in the district, and the cloth manufactured by them is reported to be in great demand", wrote F. J. Monahan, the Commissioner of the Rajshahi district in 1912.⁷⁸ It was reported in another government report in 1918-19 that the Pabna weavers were well off and had a ready market on the spot for all the *lungis* that they produced.⁷⁹ Fine cloths were made at Sadullapur, Nishchintapur and Aminpur in the sadar subdivision and at Delua, Gachhapur and Chotadhul in the Sirajganj subdivision. The *chadders* and cloth made at Delua were of especially fine quality and in good demand among the upper classes. The yarn with which they manufactured the goods was mostly English and some Japanese in origin, and ranged between 20s and 40s. The industry was confined to Muslim *Jolahas* and a few Hindu *tantis* near Pabna, the outturn of their annual production being 7.5 million yards.⁸⁰

In the Presidency Division, Jessore and Nadia district had the largest number of weaving population. The centres of the industry in Nadia district were Santipur, Kushtia, Kamarkhali, Harinarayanpur, Meherpur and Kishnagar.⁸¹ Fine cloth with coloured borders were made at Santipur with yarns of 80 counts and onwards.⁸² Besides fine Santipur muslin, the district also manufactured *dhutis*, bed-sheets, wraps, coating, twill, sheeting, etc which found a ready market.⁸³ The number of persons whose principal occupation was weaving, spinning and sizing was 7,340 in the district of Jessore as per the census return of 1931.⁸⁴ Jessore weavers made coarse cloths of everyday use and sold those locally in the important market places such as those at Kotchandpur, Jessore, Madhakul, Keshabpur and Rajarhat.⁸⁵ In Murshidabad, cotton spinning and weaving industry was once an important factor in the economic life of the peasantry. The total annual outturn of cotton fabrics woven towards the close of the nineteenth century was estimated at about Rs. 2,24,000.⁸⁶ The industry prior to World War I supported 16,000 persons, of whom 6000 were workers.⁸⁷ The number of persons whose principal occupation was weaving, spinning and sizing came down to 2,501 in 1931.⁸⁸ According to Banerji's report of 1898 the outturn of cloth woven by the weavers of Khulna district seldom exceeded the demands of the locality.⁸⁹ However, the weavers, whose number probably

did not decrease during the period of our study, responded most positively to the introduction of fly-shuttle looms and automatic looms.⁹⁰ The production of cloth, therefore, must have also increased significantly. Superior quality cloth was manufactured in Satkhira. Besides, they also produced *chadars*, *dhutis*, *saris* and *charkonas*. The handloom cotton weaving industry in 24 Parganas did not manufacture any special product worth mentioning. The annual consumption of yarn by the weavers of the district was only 317, 892 lbs. in 1939-40.⁹¹

Cotton weaving industry was still the most important cottage industry in the Hooghly district of Burdwan Division. In the Arambag subdivision, Farasdanga (in the French settlement of Chandernagore) had earned reputation for cloths of fine texture, uniformity and durability. A kind of faric, known as *rangina*, made of mixed silk, *tussur* and cotton was woven at Bali, Diwanganj, Udayraipur and in some other villages for export to the Punjab and the United Provinces.⁹² In 1906-07, the total value of the outturn in the Arambag subdivision alone was reported to have been over Rs. 14 lakhs.⁹³ Serampore subdivision, on the other hand, was the home of the fly-shuttle looms and in villages like Haripal, Dwarhata, Kaikala, Jaynagar, Kharsarai, Antpore and Rajbalhat large colonies of weavers working with fly-shuttle looms produced high-class *dhutis* and *saris*. There were as many as 800 fly-shuttle looms in the village of Rajbalhat alone.⁹⁴ In Howrah, finer cloths were woven in thana Dumjor, and in the village of Nabosan in thana Jagatballabhpur.⁹⁵ Besides producing good quality *dhutis*, *saris* and *urnis* at Chandrakona and Radhanagar, Midnapore manufacture striped cloths for coats and shirts.⁹⁶ Bankura on the other hand, produced blankets woven at Lokpur and Kendudi on the outskirts of Bankura town by the shepherd caste called Bherials.⁹⁷ In Birbhum, a small number of weavers in the town of Suri wove cloths that were claimed to be "excellently strong and durable, better in this respect than the imported cloth" with the help of fly-shuttle looms.⁹⁸ Finer fabrics such as twills, table-cloths, *pardahs*, bed-sheets, and cloth for coats and shirts, were manufactured at Bolpur, Dubrajpur, Karidha, Tantipara and Alunda.⁹⁹ In Burdwan district, fine cloth were produced at Purbasthali, Kalne, Manteswar, Bahadurpur, Baje, Itta and Srikhishtapur. At Ichapur, napkins were manufactured.¹⁰⁰ In 1907-08 and 1908-09 the annual outturn of cotton cloth was reported to have been 3.1 and 2.58 million yards, respectively.¹⁰¹ Cloths manufactured in the latter year was valued at Rs. 2,81, 378.¹⁰²

Table 6
Weaving Population in the Districts
1901-1931

District	Average weaving population in each district	Percentage of Bengal's total	Average number of weavers per 100,000 persons in the district
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dacca	17,473	8.96	587
Midnapore	15,214	7.80	549
Chittagong	14,095	7.22	899
Faridpur	13,620	6.98	620
Tippera	12,914	6.62	499
Pabna	10,823	5.55	760
Mymensingh	10,377	5.32	225
Jessore	10,347	5.30	597
Bankura	9,275	4.75	846
Backhergung	9,202	4.72	360
Noakhali	9,099	4.66	647
Hoogly	8,218	4.21	759
Nadia	7,090	3.63	449
Burdwan	5,351	2.74	352
Murshidabad	5,258	2.69	400
24 Parganas	5,140	2.63	215
Khulna	5,119	2.62	357
Birbhum	4,799	2.46	526
Malda	4,731	2.42	474
Chittagong Hill Tracts	4,396	2.25	2,645
Howrah	3,653	1.87	376
Dinajpur	2,260	1.16	134
Bogra	2,040	1.04	199
Jalpaiguri	1,935	0.99	214
Rajshahi	1,380	0.71	97
Rangpur	507	0.26	21

Source: Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, *Industrial Development*, p. 200.

Problems of weavers and government attempts to solve them

In this section we shall discuss the problems connected with the production and distribution of handloom cloths in Bengal vis-a-vis attempts made by the government to ameliorate the economic condition of those engaged in the industry. The main problems (other than that of improvements in the mechanical processes which has been discussed earlier) were: (a) the difficulty of supply of yarn at a cheap rate, (b) the dispersal of the finished products at the best possible price, (c) lack of finance and (d) want of training of weavers in new designs and patterns, texture and finish. It was largely because of these problems that the handloom weavers in Bengal were to a very great extent at a disadvantageous position in relation to textile mills.

Supply of yarn

Getting a sufficient supply of yarn at a reasonable price was the most pressing of all the problems, especially as yarn price constituted more than 70 per cent of the cost of manufacture in the case of ordinary handloom products of daily use.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, the internal trade of this important raw material was in the hands of a chain of middlemen that necessarily increased the yarn price and placed the poor weavers in a disadvantageous position in relation to mills. Such a chain of middlemen included the big yarn dealers (mainly Marwaris) in Calcutta who procured yarn from mills upon forward contract or imported them from abroad; *paikars* who usually bought on wholesale from yarn merchants or dealers and the innumerable grades of middlemen called *farias* who sold yarn in rural *hats* and bazaars or moved from village to village. However, there are no statistical figures to show the margin of profits that each grade of middlemen earned but it is well-known that by the time the yarn reached the weaver its price went up significantly. Besides middlemen who profited in marketing yarn to actual weavers, the Indian mills by 'regulating' the yarn price with foreign yarn also augmented their profit margin. If the imported duty on foreign yarn was abolished or reduced, weavers could have got yarn at much cheaper rate and thereby also compete more successfully with the mill made cloths.¹⁰⁴ When mills preoccupied themselves with the war production (1939-45) and the supply of foreign yarn stopped, 'yarn price rose very high. To mitigate the suffering of the weavers, the government provided funds for opening four depots for supplying mill yarn, but it was held in abeyance "owing to

developments in war situation".¹⁰⁵ The supply and control of yarn was placed at the disposal of the Civil Supplies Department under the Central Government's Cotton Cloth and Yarn Control Order.¹⁰⁶ But the Department was still 'trying' in 1945 to set up a proper organization for procurement and distribution of yarn.¹⁰⁷ Besides high prices of yarn, instances were not rare when unscrupulous yarn dealers resorted to unfair means, i.e., short reeling, false packing or even over declaration of weight. Hoarding was also a common occurrence among a section of yarn dealers and speculators that occasionally resulted in high and fluctuating price of yarns.

To eliminate the excess profits of the middlemen, the government attempted to solve the problem of yarn supply through co-operative methods. But the co-operative system of yarn supply could not work satisfactorily owing to the inability of the Unions to obtain yarns at wholesale rates through forward contract with the mills. As a result, the price of the yarn supplied to weavers was not always lower than the rate prevailing in the local bazaars.¹⁰⁸ In some cases, Industrial Union (e.g., Industrial Union of Chaumohini) even had to purchase yarns from local markets for distribution amongst its member societies.¹⁰⁹ This inability to supply yarn at a reasonable rate greatly hampered the successful working of the Industrial Unions and disheartened most weavers who saw no benefit accruing to them from joining the co-operative movement.

Problem of marketing

One of the probable reasons for the higher price of handloom products compared to mill-made goods was the higher cost of marketing the individual items of handlooms as contrasted with the bulk transactions by which the mill-made fabrics were marketed and sold. Not only did the yarn prices go up as it passed from the big importing houses to the weavers through several middlemen, the same process was also repeated with regard to finished article. If he had worked to order, he was fortunate; otherwise he had to take his goods to one of the nearest *hats* which were commonly held throughout rural Bengal usually once or twice a week or to daily bazaars. There he would sell his products either to retail customers or to *farias* who would usually buy for cash. The *farias* in their turn sold their goods to *paikars* or *beparis* who had their establishments in the principal centres of trade. After collecting large quantities of commodities, the *paikars* disposed them

off in bulks to the bigger *mahajans* at convenient time when prices were good. Sometimes shopkeepers would also send their agents to make purchases at these hats. In some towns, weavers themselves hawked about with their goods from house to house or from shop to shop. In marketing their products, handloom weavers had relatively little difficulty during the months from October to January and June and July when new paddy enabled the agriculturists to buy their yearly requirements of cloth. But for the remaining six months, the weavers were virtually at the mercy of *mahajans* (who were often also yarn dealers and moneylenders) as they had no holding capacity and were unable to pay cash for more yarns. Under the circumstances, they had no alternative but to accept one of the following courses if he wished to keep their loom working.

- (a) They could deposit their finished cloth with the yarn dealer against the price of new yarn taken, in the hope that the market would improve and enable them to get full price. This was, of course a very temporary expedient.
- (b) They could sell the cloth outright to the dealer at a discount on the usual sale price.
- (c) If the yarn dealer was unwilling to buy the cloth, the weaver was compelled to sell his products to any private customer at any price he could get. In some cases, when sales were slack, he could get no more than the value of the yarn in the cloth.

To tackle the problem, government encouraged co-operative methods of sale through Industrial Unions. In doing so, however, the Unions continually faced difficulties and sustained financial losses. The principal reason for the failure of the Co-operative Unions to solve the marketing problem was due to the high price charged for all yarns. Secondly, the overhead charges of the Co-operative Industrial Unions were higher and this meant that the minimum market price of cotton fabrics of the handloom industry was much higher than the prices at which the mill products of similar quality and attractiveness were sold. To relieve the Industrial Unions in disposing off their finished goods, the Unions were federated into a provincial organization in 1929 styled the Bengal Provincial Co-operative Industrial Society Limited. But "for want of sufficient funds at

its disposal" and because it worked mainly with borrowed capital for which it had to pay a high rate of interest, the provincial organization could not be of much help to the Industrial Unions. It only maintained a Sale Depot in Calcutta in which finished goods were displayed.¹¹⁰ Apart from Co-operative methods of marketing the government provided periodic grants and subsidies to certain organizations and associations devoted to the cause of marketing the products of cottage industries like the Bengal Home Industries Association and Good Companions. The Bengal Home Industries Association received an annual government grant varying from Rs. 25,000 in 1919-20 to Rs. 10,000 in 1926-27. However, from 1927-28 grants-in-aid to the Association was stopped and it was only renewed again from 1935-36 on political grounds.¹¹¹ The government also sanctioned an annual grant-in-aid of Rs. 3,000 only to the Good Companions which started its operation in January 1934 for marketing the products of the industrial Missions and Associations formed for the purpose of encouraging village handicrafts.¹¹² The attempts of the Bengal government in this line thus proved to be absolutely inadequate even compared to the Punjab and the United Provinces which maintained emporiums for stocking and advertising the products of the cottage and small industries of those provinces.¹¹³ However, as a result of a strong recommendation of the Director of Industries, Bengal (G. S. Dutt), the government in 1933 decided to appoint a Marketing and Publicity Officer under the Unemployment Relief Scheme.¹¹⁴ It is unlikely, however, that any significant change had been brought about by the mere appointment of a marketing officer.

Problems of finance

Of all the problems faced by the handloom weavers of Bengal, access to capital at a reasonable rate of interest was most notable. They needed capital for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they needed block capital to purchase their appliances like looms, preparatory machinery and accessories. They also needed money to purchase raw materials like yarns to work upon. Together with these, they required reserve capital, as finished goods often remained unsold for want of markets, especially during slack seasons when they had to purchase yarn to keep them employed. Secondly, they had also to maintain his family, which often consisted of four to five

members on the average. Since handloom weavers lived at subsistence level, they had virtually no reserve capital to fall back upon and had ordinarily to resort to moneylenders or yarn dealers or cloth merchants who were often one and the same person. In almost all cases they were employed on payment either in kind or in money varying from one anna to two and a half anna per yard by middlemen *mahajans*. They dictated the kinds of woven materials to be produced, supplied the necessary yarn for the purpose and took the finished products.¹¹⁵ In other words, 75 per cent of the weavers were merely piece rate wage earners under the *mahajan* who was the businessman.¹¹⁶ Even in the case of so-called independent weavers who constituted 25 per cent of the total weaving population, they were not always in affluent circumstances and had occasionally to borrow from the *mahajans*.¹¹⁷ Once the handloom weavers got indebted to the *mahajan* it was very difficult, if not impossible, for them to get out. The *mahajans* on their part also rather encouraged the weavers, as a certain amount of indebtedness on the part of the weavers was a considerable safeguard during the months when they were likely to become a defaulter.¹¹⁸ In such a contractual relationship, the *mahajan* being the dominant partner determined the terms and conditions in his own favour, leaving only a bare subsistence to the actual worker and appropriated to himself all the commercial advantages of the processes of buying and selling. Any attempt to organize the handloom industry by capitalists was strenuously opposed by *mahajans*, and their control over the weavers was sufficient to ensure its defeat.

The government on its turn did next-to-nothing to improve the financial position of the weavers so that they could free themselves from the clutches of the middlemen. It is true that the Bengal Agricultural Debtor's Act, 1935 was passed but the cottage industrialists did not come within the purview of this Act and hence they could not claim relief from their indebtedness. The All-Bengal Jamitua Momineen (central organization for Bengal weavers) was very bitter at the apathy and neglect of the state and complained that the weavers of Bengal had not profited by the co-operative movement, either for credit or for production and marketing. Hence, they had to depend on the *mahajans* in consequence of which they were compelled to sell their finished goods at a rate less than the market price.¹¹⁹ It called upon the government to protect and subsidize the actual weavers with money grant and regulate price of yarn. The state, however, granted

loans to the ex-students of Government Weaving Institutes in order to enable them to follow the profession independently. These loans were granted against efficient security bearing an interest of six and a half per cent per annum repayable in 24 equal installments.¹²⁰ But the amount of such grant from 1929-30 to 1938-39 totaled only Rs. 37,562. This money was distributed among 532 passed students, the average disbursed amount being slightly over Rs. 70 only.¹²¹

Lack of training

Handloom weavers of Bengal also suffered considerably, as there was little change in respect of new designs and patterns, texture and finish. The government did set up Demonstration Parties for giving practical lessons to the weavers in the art of weaving in fine and fancy *saris* on fly-shuttle loom and in jacquard. The Demonstration Parties also taught modern methods of dyeing and block printing, etc. However, in practice the Demonstration Parties were little more than 'thamasha' or 'mock show'. "The sooner this mock show is closed down the better", felt a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly.¹²² On the other hand, the weavers on their part also showed a general reluctance to get themselves trained as new designs involved the use of improved appliances like sleys of various reed space, vibrating box sley, dobbies, jacquard machines and looms such as 'Chittaranjan' or 'Salvation Army' loom. The weavers were in fact too poor to purchase such improved appliances. Nor could they afford to attend the training centres for days together at the sacrifice of their daily earnings. Moreover, a certain quantity of raw material was also wasted in the process of learning, which the Unions were generally unable to supply.¹²³ The 29 Peripatetic Weaving Schools that were set up all over the province under the Department of Industries till March 1939 also imparted training to weavers for a period of two months. According to a government report, 12,130 students passed out from these Institutes from 1919 till March 1938.¹²⁴ The District Weaving Schools which numbered nine (till March 1938) had higher artisan class of one year and since 1911 trained up 2,935 persons.¹²⁵ At the apex was the Serampore Weaving Institute that later changed its name to Bengal Textile Institute in 1939. The Institute gave technical instruction in the best and latest methods of weaving including practical weaving, freehand drawing, design and analysis of cloth, practical dyeing, bleaching and printing.¹²⁶ The ex-students of government weaving institutes, however,

could not fully utilize their latent potential due to lack of capital that was not forthcoming as has already been pointed out earlier. With the help of the Government of India in November 1935, skilled staff consisting of one Weaving Expert and a number of Weaving Supervisors had been allotted to all the important weaving areas under the operation of Industrial Unions.¹²⁷ The duties allotted to the experts and supervisors of the Industrial Unions were to train up the weavers in producing fabrics of improved and new designs, texture and finish as also to supply them with dyed yarns and to advise them in the reduction of the cost of production.¹²⁸ A designer was also attached to the Bengal Provincial Co-operative Industrial Society Limited to supply new designs to the Industrial Unions.¹²⁹ The Designer, it was claimed at the Ninth Industries Conference, supplied 120 new designs to the different Industrial Unions and weaving organizations out of which 80 were successfully adopted by the weavers and depicted on fabrics.¹³⁰ In addition to providing experts, money was also sanctioned from the Government of India fund for the purchase of dobbies, jacquard machines, dyeing appliances and other improved machinery like sizing machine and calendering machine. This definitely enabled weavers of co-operative societies to weave fabrics of new designs and fashions and gave them a better finish.¹³¹ But, the entire process of training up weavers in respect of developing the artistic value of their products remained confined within a limited section of the weaving population, and no appropriate measures were taken to tackle the problem at its entirety. This was a serious flaw in government planning, especially when they themselves realized that the future of the industry lay "in the direction of developing the artistic value of their products and a continuous living touch with the market . . . as to the requirements of the consumers in respect of textures, designs and other particulars".¹³²

In summing up, we can say that although about two lakh weavers were employed in Bengal in handloom cotton textile industry, and for the development of which the Government of Bengal spent about Rs. 2.50 lakh annually,¹³³ the economic lot of actual weavers remained precarious. This was due to lack of organization and finance, inefficiency of management and inability to improve the technique of production to suit the changing needs of the public. The Co-operative Societies, which were supposed to look into these problems, in fact failed miserably to come up to expectations. In 1931,

there were only 336 societies with a total membership of 6,103.¹³⁴ Membership to societies came down to 5,467 in 1943 that formed only 2.3 per cent of the number of weaver population of Bengal.¹³⁵ "Sir, as far as handloom industry is concerned, I admit that very little has been done so far to organize the handloom weavers in a proper manner", admitted Khawja Shahabuddin in the Assembly.¹³⁶ Besides the failure of co-operative movement, the cheaper mill-made cloths, both foreign and Indian, and the import of artificial silk accelerated the decline. The economic depression of 1930s by reducing the purchasing power of the masses also adversely affected the position of the weavers. During World War II, the handloom industry faced additional difficulty. "In fact, it was found extremely difficult in most provinces to get within a reasonable competitive range of mill prices".¹³⁷ At the end of the colonial period, the industry was thus in a languishing state, the artisans somehow eked out a precarious living.

It is an irony of fate that cotton manufactures that once topped Bengal's export list, became the most important item of foreign import in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Thus, in 1921-22, of all the foreign items imported through the port of Calcutta, cotton goods alone amounted to Rs. 27.19 crore out of a total import value of Rs. 101.55 crore. In other words, 26.8 per cent of the imports of that year consisted of cotton goods.¹³⁸ If imports through coasts, and by rail and river from other Indian provinces are taken into consideration, Bengal's external dependency becomes all the glaring. This dependency, however, could have been obviated much earlier had the state taken appropriate measures to foster a struggling cotton industry against foreign competition. With partial imposition of tariff on foreign imports in 1926-27, cotton mills started to come up in Bengal but before long the Second World War intervened and imports of mill machinery virtually ceased.¹³⁹ What is, however, more important is the fact that by 1939 no less than 43 per cent of the internal production of cloth was manufactured by Bengal mills against 12 per cent in 1920-21 (Appendix II). During World War II, the production of cloth by Bengal mills may have expanded further due to large orders being placed by the government. It should also be mentioned here that mills of Bengal were processing more of their yarn into cloth.¹⁴⁰ The unorganized handloom cotton sector, on the other hand, received a great boost as a result of *Swadeshi* and nationalist movement in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Along with

private individuals, government also stepped in to uplift the economic status of all those engaged in the industry. Improved looms and accessories were made available to weavers which increased production tremendously. Unfortunately, however, the weavers themselves could hardly enjoy the fruits of their labour. Being indigent, they were at the mercy of *mahajans* for the supply of yarn, for marketing finished products, and for capital requirements during slack seasons. The co-operative movement through which government attempted to solve these problems ended in dismal failure. During Second World War, unable to get a sufficient supply of yarn, handloom production suffered, and with that the plight of the weavers knew no bounds.¹⁴¹ That was, however, only a temporary set back and must not be overemphasized. In the end, it may quite confidently be stated that excepting during the period from 1939 till 1947 when political dislocations prevailed in India, both the branches of the textile industry progressively contributed to the requirements of cloth of the province. The industry as a whole was heading towards self-sufficiency in the production of cloth, if not of yarn.

Notes and References

1. Vera Anstey, *The Economic Development of India* (London, 1939), p. 209.
2. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, 'State of Indigenous Industries', in S. Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh, Vol. II, Economic History* (Revised Edition, Dhaka, 1992), pp. 372-378.
3. The present vernacular word *kapas* is most probably derived from the *karpasi* mentioned in the Institution of Manu, as the fabric from which the Brahmanical thread was prepared. Even earlier to Manu, it is said to have been mentioned in Rigveda. N. N. Banerjei, *Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1898), p.1.
4. A description of various kinds of cotton produced in Dhaka and in other districts of Bengal is to be found in Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, 'State of Indigenous Industries', in S. Islam (ed.) *History of Bangladesh, 1704-1971, Vol. II, Economic History* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Second Edition, Dhaka, 1997, pp. 358-59; D. B. Mitra, *The Cotton Weavers of Bengal, 1757-1833* (Calcutta, 1978), pp. 155-157.
5. *Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council* (henceforth BLCP), July 3, 1918, Vol. L, p. 727. Steps were redoubled in this direction since 1903 by the Department of Agriculture (established in 1885). *Proceedings of the Council of the Lt. Governor of Bengal*, February 17, 1906, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 2.
6. J. G. Medlicott, *Cotton Handbook for Bengal* (Calcutta, 1862), p. 33.
7. *Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal* (henceforth MTB) 1918-19 (Calcutta, 1919), p. 15 ; BLCP, July 3, 1918, Vol. L, P. 727 ; N. N. Banerjei, *Monograph*, p. 1. The Indian Cotton Committee, 1919 felt that the climate of Bengal was 'unsuited' to the exotic varieties and that there was no prospect of any appreciable extension of the area under the indigenous species. *Report on the Administration of Bengal* (henceforth RAB), 1918-19, p. 64.
8. Bengal Financial Proceedings (commerce), March 1921, p. 17.
9. *Census of India, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part I, Appendix I*, p. 305.
10. BLCP, March 22, 1939, Vol. VIV, No. 4, p. 82.
11. See, for example, the chapter on occupations in the *Census of India, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part II, Tables* (Calcutta, 1932), pp. 70-153.
12. It is to be noted that a large part of the cotton imported from other provinces was for re-export. In 1921-22, for example, 4.29 per cent of the total merchandise exported from Calcutta port was of raw cotton. The export value of this item stood at Rs. 3.69 crore. *MTB, 1921*, p. 14.
13. Before modern factory system, women cleaned cotton i. e., seeds were separated from the wool through instruments called *cherkee* and *dullen cathee*. See, for details E. B. Havell, *Essays on Indian Art, Industry and Education* (Madras, 1910), p. 33.
14. *Report of the Bengal Industrial Survey Committee* (henceforth BISC) (Alipore, 1948), pp. 194-195.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.
16. See Appendix I.
17. Tulsi Ram Sharma, *Location of Industries in India* (Bombay, 1946), p. 16.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
19. RAB, 1904-05, p. 75.
20. *Census of India, 1921, Vol. V, Bengal, Part II, Tables*, p. 402. Of the labourers, 6,109 were skilled workers who included 549 females. Amongst the skilled workers, 2,214 were born in Bengal, 1,506 in Orissa and 1,104 in the United Provinces. In the case of unskilled labourers who numbered 7,288, those born in Bengal were 1,134 compared to 2,403 who hailed from Orissa and 2,344 from the United Provinces. Thus only 26.48 per cent of the

- total workers (both categories together) were born in Bengal. See *Ibid*, Part I, pp. 436-37. In 1939, 40 per cent of the labourers was said to be non-Bengalis. *Capital*, June 29, 1939, p. 959. As regards wages paid to various classes of workmen employed in cotton mills, see, Government of Bengal: Financial Proceedings (Commerce), June 1920, No. 37, p. 87.
21. For a comprehensive account regarding the grant of protection to the cotton textile industry in India see Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 240-244.
 22. Tulsi Ram Sharma, *Location of Industries*, p. 27. It was also reported that "small cotton mills are springing up all over the province . . .". *Capital*, July 23, 1936, p. 123.
 23. *Capital*, August 3, 1939, p. 155.
 24. *MTB*, 1921-22, p. 21.
 25. See Appendix I.
 26. The average yield of the jute mills for the twelve years from 1914-19 and 1928-33 was 12.06; of tea 6.92 per cent; of the coal industry 5.38 per cent. The average yield of the cotton mills for those years was 6.31 per cent. See A.Z.M. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1900-1939* (New Delhi, 1982), pp. 104-111.
 27. *Bulletin No. 75, Cotton Mills*, p. 6.
 28. *BISC*, pp. 37-38. It must, however, be pointed out at the same time that the mills were consuming more and more of their own yarn with the passing of time. For example, balance mill production of Bengal yarn for handloom totaled just over 30 million lbs. in 1913-14. It came down to 6.58 million lbs. in 1938-39. See, the unpublished version of Iftikhar-ul-Awwal's Ph.D thesis entitled *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1930-1939* submitted at the University of London in 1978, pp. 387-88.
 29. *Capital*, November 8, 1928, p. 940. Percentages have been calculated from absolute figures.
 30. Government of Bengal: Financial Proceedings (commerce), November 1918, No. 5, p. 11.
 31. For a description of various kind of goods produced in the cotton mills of Bengal in 1932-33 and in 1936-37, see Government of Bengal, Department of Industries, *Bulletin No. 75, Cotton Mill Industry*, p. 47.
 32. *BISC*, p. 49.
 33. Import of cotton machinery through the port of Calcutta (in value terms) increased from Rs. 6.71 lakhs in 1942-43 to 27.82 lakhs in 1946-47.
 34. *Report of the Indian Tariff Board regarding the grant of Protection to the Cotton Textile Industry* (Calcutta, 1932), p. 171.
 35. See for details, Awwal, *Industrial Development*, pp. 197-198.
 36. *The Bengal Review*, Vol. I, No. 10, October 1905, p. 248.
 37. *Industrial India*, Vol. I, No. 4, April 1904, p. 56.
 38. Government of Bengal (henceforth GOB), Bengal Revenue Proceedings (henceforth BRP), (Industries), October 1932, Nos. 7-8 p. 15.
 39. *Report regarding the grant of protection to the Cotton Textile Industry* (Calcutta, 1932), p. 174.
 40. Awwal, *Industrial Development*, pp. 203-205.
 41. J. G. Cumming, *Review of Industrial position and prospects, Part II of Special Report* p.8. This was the effective speed and must not be confused with the working speed that was much higher. For an arithmetical clarification, see Rao Bahadur B. Patel, 'Hand-loom Weaving in India', *Report of the Second Indian Industrial Conference* held at Calcutta, December 1906 (Calcutta, 1907), p. 209.
 42. *BLCP*, July 3, 1918, Vol. L, p. 726.

43. GOB, Department of Industries (henceforth DOI), *Annual Administration Report, 1926*, p. 14.
44. GOB: Bengal General Proceedings (Education), December 1908, No 153, p. 1415.
45. The country weavers who dug pits underneath the loom to accommodate the weaver's feet operating the treadle levers generally used the pit fly-shuttle loom. In the case of the Serampore fly-shuttle looms, although the operation was similar to the pit-loom, it was mounted on a frame and as such no pits were dug. These looms could also be moved, if necessary, from place to place without any difficulty. A. Guha, *The Installation of Small Weaving Factories* (Calcutta, 1924), pp. 5-6.
46. J. G. Cumming, *Review of the Industrial position*, Part II, p. 8.
47. Prior to 1912, the Officer worked as weaving master in the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam (*Report of the Agricultural Department, Bengal, for the year ending 30th June 1912*, p. 1). From 1912 to 1919, he worked under the charge of the Director of Agriculture when his service was transferred to the administrative control of the Director of Industries from the 1st of December 1919. RAB, 1920-21, p. 64.
48. GOB: BRP (Industries), June 1936, Nos. 6-7, p. 41.
49. GOB: BRP (Industries), October 1930, Nos. 17-18, p. 11. See, "Rules for the Supply of Weaving Appliances to the Hand-loom Weavers of Bengal".
50. *Report of the Fact-finding Committee (Handloom and Mills)*, (Delhi, 1942), p. 32.
51. Former students of the Serampore Weaving Institute, unemployed *bhadrologs* and students mainly used these relatively costly but improved looms. See, *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission*, Vol. II, p. 214; *Star of India*, February 12, 1936, p. 3. Wider dissemination of such looms was impossible in view of their prohibitive price. The price of the Salvation Army loom, for example, was Rs. 110 and that of Hattersley automatic loom about Rs. 600. See, A Guha, *The Installation of Small Weaving Factories*, p. 6.
52. GOB: Proceedings of the Agriculture and Industries Department, October 1932, Nos. 7-8, p. 12.
53. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, March 25, 1938, Vol. LII, No. 5, (Alipore, 1938), p. 418.
54. BISC, pp. 43-44.
55. *Report of the Fact-finding Committee (Handloom and Mills)*, p. 120.
56. E. W. Collin, *Report on the Existing Arts and Industries in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1890), p. 11. The name 'muslin' is derived from the word 'Moussul' which is a town in Turkish Asia, where it is said to have been first manufactured. See N. N. Banerjee, *Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Bengal*, pp. 27-28. On the other hand, muslin, Chiffon and fine fabrics, whether of cotton or of silk, was known by the generic name of *mal-mal*.
57. Collin, *Report on the Existing Arts*, p. 11.
58. *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Dacca* (Allahabad, 1912), p. 113.
59. *Ibid.*, and Collin, *op. cit.*; pp. 10-11.
60. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Mymensingh* (Calcutta, 1917), p. 77.
61. *Ibid.*, *Faridpur* (Calcutta, 1925), p. 77.
62. *Ibid.*, *Bakarganj* (Calcutta, 1918), p. 80.
63. *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Chittagong* (Calcutta, 1908), p. 120.
64. RAB, 1935-36, p. 173.
65. *Ibid.*, 1911-12, p. 37; *Ibid.*, 1912-13, p. 61.
66. G. N. Gupta, *A Survey of the Industries & Resources of Eastern Bengal and Assam for 1907-08* (Shillong, 1908), p. 83.
67. *Ibid.*

68. *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Tippera* (Allahabad, 1910), pp.55-56.
69. *Ibid.*, Noakhali (Allahabad, 1911), p. 71.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *RAB*, 1914-15, p. 68.
72. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling* (Calcutta, 1907), p. 127.
73. *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Rangpur* (Allahabad, 1911), pp. 84,89.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
75. *Ibid.*, Dinajpur (Allahabad, 1912), p. 78.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
77. Banerjei, *op. cit.* p. 55.
78. GOB: General Proceedings (Miscellaneous), October 1912, p.138; *RAB*, 1913-14, pp. 65-66.
79. *Report on the Working of the Co-operative Societies in Bengal, 1918-19* (Calcutta, 1919), p. 13.
80. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Pabna* (Calcutta, 1923), p. 62.
81. *Ibid.*, Nadia (Calcutta, 1910), p. 93.
82. *BISC*, p. 44.
83. *RAB*, 1915-16, p. 68.
84. *Census of India, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part II, Tables* (Calcutta, 1932), p. 91
85. Banerjei, *op. cit.*, p. 55; A Guha, *Installation of Small Weaving Factories*, Appendix B.
86. Banerjei, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
87. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Murshidabad* (Calcutta, 1914), p. 124.
88. *Census of India, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal & Sikkim, Part II, Tables*, p. 91.
89. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
90. See Table 5.
91. *BISC*, Appendix IX, pp. 278-79.
92. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Hooghly* (Calcutta, 1912), p. 185.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
94. GOB: General Proceedings (Miscellaneous), December 1908, p. 1416.
95. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Howrah* (Calcutta, 1909), p.98.
96. *Ibid.*, Midnapore (Calcutta, 1911), p. 126.
97. *Ibid.*, Bankura (Calcutta, 1908), p. 113.
98. GOB: General Proceedings (Miscellaneous), December 1908, p. 1415.
99. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Birbhum* (Calcutta, 1910), p. 76.
100. *Ibid.*, Burdwan (Calcutta, 1910), pp. 122-123.
101. GOB: BRP, October 1909, pp. 151-152.
102. *Bengal District Gazetteers, Burdwan*, p. 123.
103. Awwal, *Industrial Development*, pp. 220-222.
104. Though foreign yarn was subject to a minimum of 5 per cent import duty, the specific duty came to about 25 to 33 per cent of the cost of the yarn as the weavers mostly wove from counts varying from 10 to 20. See K. Mitra and P.P. Lakshman, *Cottage Industries in Indian Economy* (Allahabad, 1947), p. 149. All Bengal Jamiatul Momineen felt that the prices charged by the Cotton Mills for yarn was 'arbitrary and exorbitant' and without any 'rhyme or reason'. To them it was possible 'only because the Handloom Weavers and their

- consumers are disorganized and defenseless against their formidable organization'. *Star of India*, July 24, 1939, p. 7.
105. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, May 9, 1944, Vol. LXVII, No. 5 (Alipore 1944), pp. 51-52.
 106. *Ibid.*, March 18, 1944, Vol. LXVII, No. 3 (Alipore 1944), pp. 252-257.
 107. *Ibid.*, March 24, 1945, Vol. LXIX, No. 2 (Alipore 1945), pp. 504-505
 108. J. P. Niyogi, *The Co-operative Movement in Bengal* (London, 1940), p. 240.
 109. *Annual Report on the Working of Co-operative Societies in the Presidency of Bengal, 1927-28*, p. 28.
 110. *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 52 (Proceedings of the Sixth Industries Conference) (Delhi, 1934), pp. 44-45.
 111. See also Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, 'Activities of the Bengal Home Industries Association, 1917-1940', in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Humanities), Vols. XXIV-VI, 1979-81, pp. 179-188.
 112. Bangladesh Archives, Proceedings of the Agriculture and Industries 2G.
Department (Industries), B Proceedings, Bundle 6, File No. 9 of 1938; and GOB: BRP (Industries), September 1934, No. 12, p. 21.
 113. GOB: BRP (Industries), October 1933, Nos. 1-2, p. 3.
 114. *Ibid.*, No. 3, p. 6.
 115. GOB: Proceedings of the Department of Agriculture and Industries, October 1932, No. 9, p. 123.
 116. G. N. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 14; K. B. Saha, *Economics of Rural Bengal* (Calcutta, 1930), p. 164.
 117. BISC, p. 47.
 118. A. E. Brown, 'The Economic Conditions of the Cotton Weavers of the Bankura District', *Bengal Economic Journal*, Vol. I, No. 3 (Calcutta, January 1917), p. 312.
 119. *Star of India*, July 24, 1939, p. 7.
 120. GOB: *Annual Report of the Department of Industries, 1936-37*, p. 37.
 121. *Ibid.*, 1929-30 (Calcutta, 1930), p. 8 and subsequent annual issues till 1938-39.
 122. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol. LII, No. 5, March 25, 1938, p. 415. See the speech of Mr. Sukumar Dutta. The Demonstration Parties were set up also as a counter measure against terrorist activities in the province. GOB: Proceedings of the Agriculture and Industries Department (Industries), November 1935, No. 4, p. 4.
 123. GOB: BRP (Industries), October 1936, Nos. 7-8, p. 18.
 124. GOB: *Annual Report of the Department of Industries, 1938-39*, Appendix II, p.38.
 125. *Ibid.*, Appendix I, p. 37.
 126. GOB: Proceedings of the Agriculture and Industries Department, September 1922, No. 9, pp. 11-12.
 127. RAB, 1935-36, p.126; and *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 59 (Proceedings of the Eighth Industries Conference) (Delhi, 1937), p. 26.
 128. *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 59, p. 26.
 129. *Ibid.*
 130. *Ibid.*, No. 65, (Proceedings of the Ninth Industries Conference) (Delhi, 1938), p. 22.
 131. GOB: BRP (Industries), November 1935, Nos. 5-8, 20-25, pp. 5-11, 21-26.
 132. *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 50 (Proceedings of the Fifth Industries Conference) (Delhi, 1933) p. 66.

133. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, March 6, 1940, Vol. LVI, No. 3 (Alipore, 1940), p. 70.
134. *Report on the Working of the Co-operative Societies in Bengal ending 30th June, 1932* (Calcutta, 1933), p. 11.
135. *Bengal Legislative Council Debates*, February 17, 1943, First Session (Alipore, 1943), p. 11.
136. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, March 18, 1944, Vol. LXVII, No. 3, (Alipore, 1944), p. 256.
137. *Capital*, January 23, 1941, p. 104.
138. MTB, 1921-22, pp. 4,11.
139. Some addition to existing mill machinery was however made when a few Indian firms like Texmaco, Calcutta and Indian Machinery Company Ltd., Howrah started, among other things, manufacturing cotton spinning and weaving machinery. *Report of the Indian Tariff Board on the Cotton Textile Machinery* (Bombay, 1949), pp. 3-7.
140. See reference 28 of this article.
141. In 1934-35, Bengal weavers required 48.2 million lbs. of yarn. Out of this, 39.9 million lbs. was supplied by Bengal and the Indian mills, and only 8.3 million lbs. by foreign importation. The need of the weavers increased to 62.1 million lbs. in 1938-39 (see Appendix II) . But during the War, there was rationing of yarn, and allotment for Bengal handloom came down to only 34.08 million lbs. *Star of India*, July 9, 1945, p. 1.

Appendix I

List of Cotton Mills of Bengal Employing Over 1,000 Workers in 1937

Name of the Mill (1)	Date of Registration (2)	Paid-up capital Rs. (3)	Number employed (4)	Comments (6)
1 Kesoram Cotton Mills,	October 1919	35,00,000	5,696	-
2 Dunbar Cotton Mills Ltd.	First regtd. in 1876	19,00,000	1,228	The paid-up capital also includes that of I, II, & III
3 Mohini Cotton Mills	February, 1908	13,99,985	2,491	Includes Debentures of Rs. 4, 15, 000.
4 Bowreah Cotton Mills	1832	18,00,000	1,848	It is the oldest cotton mill in India
5 Sree Radha Krishna Cotton Mills, No. 1	Re-registered in 1936	30,00,000	1,027	Paid-up capital includes that of No. (6) Mill as well.
6 Sree Radha Krishna Cotton Mills, No. 2,	Same as No. (5) Mill	Included in No. (5) Mill	1,855	
7 The Bengal Luxmi Cotton Mill	1906	7,11,280	2,688	
8 The Dhakeswari Cotton Mills Ltd.	1922	24,01,430	2,684	
9 Rampooria Cotton Mill	Commenced work in 1922	Private Concern	1,203	

Sources : Columns (1) & (4) from *Large Industrial Establishments in India, 1937* (Delhi, 1939), p. 4. Columns (2), (3), (5) & (6) compiled from DOIB: Bulletin No. 75, *Cotton Mill Industry in Bengal* (Alipore, 1937), pp. 12-19.

Appendix II

Consumption of Yarn and Production of Cloth in Handlooms and Cotton Textile Industry

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Consumption of yarn in handloom industry (in '000 lbs.)	Handloom production of cloth in '000 yds	Percentage of (2) to total internal production	Consumption of yarn in cotton mills ('000 lbs.)	Cotton mill production of cloth ('000 yds.)	Percentage of mill-made cloth to total internal production	Total internal production of cloth in Bengal (in '000 yds.)
1900-01	43,096	172,384	99.21	286	1,367	0.79	173,751
1901-02	49,730	198,920	99.16	351	1,678	0.84	200,598
1902-03	53,026	212,104	99.17	370	1,769	0.83	213,873
1903-04	46,537	186,148	98.44	617	2,949	1.56	189,097
1904-05	48,385	193,540	98.44	643	3,074	1.56	196,614
1905-06	65,263	261,052	98.94	587	2,806	1.06	263,858
1906-07	52,463	209,852	97.39	1,175	5,617	2.61	215,469
1907-08	45,064	180,256	95.62	1,727	8,255	4.38	188,511
1908-09	47,539	190,156	93.96	2,555	12,213	6.04	202,369
1909-10	39,692	158,768	92.82	2,568	12,275	7.18	171,043
1910-11	45,640	182,560	93.85	2,504	11,969	6.15	194,529
1911-12	43,048	172,192	93.82	2,371	11,333	6.18	183,525

1912-13	33,964	135,856	88.82	3,579	17,108	11.18	152,964
1913-14	30,684	122,736	89.19	3,113	14,880	10.81	137,616
1914-15	31,193	124,772	91.52	2,418	11,558	8.48	136,330
1915-16	35,675	142,700	92.58	2,393	11,439	7.42	154,139
1916-17	31,812	127,248	87.71	3,729	17,825	12.29	145,073
1917-18	32,849	131,396	86.02	4,467	21,352	13.98	152,748
1918-19	30,062	120,248	84.30	4,685	22,394	15.70	142,642
1919-20	18,262	73,048	74.58	5,208	24,894	25.42	97,942
1920-21	39,540	158,160	87.96	4,530	21,653	12.04	179,813
1933-34	60,545	242,180	70.59	21,109	100,901	29.41	343,081
1934-35	48,220	192,880	58.27	28,900	138,142	41.73	331,022
1935-36	58,728	234,912	62.80	29,108	139,136	37.20	374,048
1936-37	53,161	212,644	58.75	31,238	149,318	41.25	361,962
1937-38	57,265	229,060	59.29	32,906	157,291	40.71	386,351
1938-39	62,147	248,588	57.07	39,114	186,965	42.93	435,553

Source: A. Z. M. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1900-1939* (New Delhi, 1982), pp. 207-08.